

## *I Have A Right To Show My Color, Darling*

### ARTIST'S NOTE:

In the queer world, *reading* and *shade* are considered fundamental practices rooted in the creation and maintenance of both ballroom and drag spaces. *Paris is Burning* differentiates the practices as instruments of offering criticism versus engaging in banter amongst peers and friends (Livingston, 1990). While both are Black queer forms of insult throwing, *reading* is performed to take an adversary down through exposition, while *shade* is a verbal spar between equals. Yet, these skills have gained new life through works like *POSE*, where Black Queer language is allowed to permeate white cis-het space, evolving into a self-defense mechanism and a bearer for social commentary (Murphy, 2019). Exposition evolves and language gains strength to combat microaggressive and bigoted vitriol that often targets Black Queer bodies.

This evolution is part of the evergrowing work of Black Queer art and theory (Johnson, 2016) and what Amideo (2021) refers to linguistic “tidalectics,” a constant ebb and flow of language’s changing utility, strength, and meaning. Johnson outlines that a new generation of Black Queer artistry and thought has ushered in an era of bluntness and expectations of equity. Envy and commending these qualities, Johnson finds that this work physically embodies the phrase “*No tea, no shade*,” meaning no gossip and no disrespect (2016). Murphy’s work behind *POSE* and the monologues of *reads* delivered in this work were my starting point to understanding the nature of this growth and a new era of Black Queer art.

In responding to Murphy’s work, I grew to appreciate a new element to this craft beyond just the written word — elements of poetic rhythm to *reading* and the figurative craft of *shade*. Brody emphasizes the natural element of the poetic in Queer language as she abstracts the use of

punctuation. She celebrates this campiness inherent in queer speech, illuminating elements of performance inherent to craft (2008). Murphy plays with the poetic by underscoring *reads* with rhythm (2019). Amideo explicitly ties linguistics and new work to Lorde's poem, "A Litany for Survival" and how these new evolutions are part of an "elaborate litany for thriving" (2021). This connection brought me back to Lorde's (1978 & 1997) and Shange's (2002) works that, in carrying anger, crafted responses to marginalizing forces and explored this power in language as a means of surviving and thriving.

As a Brown Queer drag artist at a white institution, navigating the legacies of Black Queer artistic practice during the politicized genocide of Brown people, I've been angry. I've struggled to find words and maintain composure. Upon learning of the power behind *reading* and this gained bass when combined with the poetic, I aimed to explore anger, language, and *shade* through poetry, responding to tumultuous moments of grief and opposition from white bodies in queer space. This poetry pulls from my research and lived experiences. I try to play with punctuation, images of water, and *reads* as poems. Here is my anger, honed and crafted, into eight pieces, a collection entitled *I Have A Right To Show My Color, Darling*.

***I Have A Right To Show My Color, Darling***

*A collection of 8 pieces*

By Zaki Rob

***Haus Rules*** by Zaki Rob

Welcome to my haus.  
Haus of Chic.  
Chic Haus.  
I am its Mother. Father?  
Guardian.

Not to be blunt, but  
Let's lay out some rules.  
They're mostly self-explanatory,  
Or just plain common sense,  
But they bear repeating.

One,  
Be cunt, not a cunt.  
Engage in your art, yet  
Don't disparage the arts of others.  
Critique to construct not demolish.

Two,  
Pay your respects.  
Know your hirstory,  
Understand the legacies.  
To take space without doing so is colonial.

Three,  
Acknowledge your privileges.  
What path led you here?  
How did you come to hold your opportunities?  
What truths restrict how you push for a voice?

*C'est très facile, non?*  
*C'est très chic?*  
*Un, deux, trois et...pouf!*  
*Bienvenue*  
*Chez moi*

***Kiki*** by Zaki Rob

You want to kiki with me?  
Well, let's volley darling.  
It takes two to tango.  
It takes two to battle.

For the unaffiliated,  
Kikis sound soft.  
But they come with an edge.  
But they come with a bond.

I say your wigs are fried.  
You say my make-up is busted.  
Yet, we both don't need to be told.  
Yet, we both know.

Kikis happen in the backrooms.  
When we're getting ready for war.  
Be a pal.  
Be a sister.

I'll work on blocking my brows.  
You'll retouch that contour.  
This is how we learn.  
This is how we bond.

It's no shade.  
Just a couple reads or several.  
I don't want to hurt your feelings.  
I want to help you.

Kikis get lost, though,  
When you start to hurt me.  
Suddenly, I'm not performing right.  
Suddenly, I can't breathe.

*No Pink Lemonade* by Zaki Rob

*No tea, No shade*

*Your mug is kind of busted.*

I just woke up. Inflammation engulfs  
My face. My tear ducts are the Sahara.

*No tea, No shade*

*Your outfits not giving tonight.*

I sewed her myself. It's my first  
Passion project. Every stitch and every stone.

*No tea, No shade*

*This wig looks rotted.*

She reminds me of my mother. Course  
To the touch and in spirit. A little ethnic even.

*No tea, No shade*

*I don't get what you do.*

I'm challenged to differentiate  
Myself. I avoid being a carbon copy of you.

All tea? All shade?

Your pitches plummet and drown.  
No bridge to catch them.

How I'm stoned with little technique  
And blood sheds into river.

Ready to serve; pink lemonade.

***Hold No Blame*** by Zaki Rob

Confrontation

Is an ordeal that's rarely gifted to me.  
For I find every reason to remain tame,  
'Less you become frightened.

Yet, here you so stand. So boldly,  
You do. Every ounce mustered up to question  
Exactly what I do. How I operate. You must  
Know. It baffles you.

What's not to baffle? You've never once  
Had to contemplate. You enter a room and  
You belong. Yet, never noticed that I must be granted  
Entry. Even to lay the foundation under you.

Now I look into your eyes. Your foundation  
Is cracking. Your \$2 liner is marking the tear trails.  
You can't believe I've stepped out of line.  
I can't believe that it's time.

Lorde, forgive me for I let the anger take over.  
I outline, highlight, underline, and illuminate  
All of my grievances and all of your shortcomings.  
What little complexion left flees. You go ghost.

I use my diction. I have a craft  
To my words. Even in anger, I try to spare you, sugar  
Coating every truth. Yet, you manage to best me.  
*I'm sorry (an apolo-lie) I do not hold that blame.*

*mini-challenge* by Zaki Rob

Racist is what I'd call you.  
Engulfed in your  
activism, you let anger bubble. Uncontrolled.  
Drowning out my voice, my own, others alike.  
Insisting upon taking a stand, a  
necessary step to revolution.  
Grieving my brother, you disrupt his obituary.

Imposter syndrome runs deeper than productivity. Its  
shallow ties to struggle and resistance.

"Feds" is what they'd call you back home.  
Usurping coalitions to build platforms,  
notorious for reinstating the very status quo you oppose.  
Damnation finds me. 'Fore when I speak, you  
Anger. Your problem lies with  
my use of ferocity. How am I not angrier?  
Even when I refocus back to systemic ordeals,  
Nuance flees alongside your empathy.  
tiktok. You have an argument to win.  
Adverse to conversation, you demand  
Labor from one of your kindling fags.



**MAXI-CHALLENGE** by Zaki Rob

Scared little gay boy  
*Butch Queen; First Time Out of Drags!*  
Performing for all.

A glass closet-case  
*Femme Queen Realness; O' to All!*  
Out to friends, not fam.

Gay boy at the mosque  
*Labels with a Twist; Bizarre!*  
Praying for a change.

Going far away  
*New Face and Virgin Runway!*  
New to college life.

*Getting up in drags!*  
Wishes finally are met.  
*Butch Queen up in Pumps!*

Using new pronouns  
*Some Old Way versus New Way!*  
Exploring gender.

Producing drag shows  
*Legendary, Iconic!*  
Pillar in queer space.

*Tidalectics for Survival* by Zaki Rob

How do I live?  
Where do I go?  
When am I allowed to breathe?

I'm drowning.  
The tides take me in and  
The sands sharpen to glass.

Down below...  
Currents aren't uniform and  
Corals not as pretty.

Finding treasure is purely a fluke.  
It falls into the laps of the diseased polyps,  
Insisting on avoiding the edges of dark urchins.

Wake me up when it's over.  
Pull me onto shore if needed.  
Please be gentle.

Roasts are meant to be warm.  
Laughter to accompany set quips.  
Leave me as I douse myself in bliss.

Turn the other way.  
Your jokes are mean.  
Your joy is dark sided.

Blinding whiteness  
Adamant on being a master  
Arbiter of digs that get laughs

Have you considered  
That you're not my funny equal?  
Tidal wave.

*Paid For Like Ponies* by Zaki Rob

You are not that stunning. You have the jewels and  
you have the tiaras, yet you lack the wit and rapport.  
You walk the floor in ball gowns, in varied shades  
of cerulean, jade, vermillion, and more. Yet, you stand  
lacking even an ounce of emotional maturity. It shows  
in your posture, in the cadence by which you speak.  
It shows in how you walk, how you lack confidence,  
how you lack a single experience that shaped you.  
How could anything shape you  
when you've never had to mold stone with just your grasp.  
When you are far too familiar with open palms  
gifting you the glitz, glimmer, and glam that you've  
come to expect the same from the world. The stone cold world.  
The same world that puts me and people like me under immense  
pressure. That's why I am a diamond; that's why WE are diamonds,  
even in dirt. You are a pearl: soft, rare, and unnatural.  
Natural pearls don't get very far, but you're picked from the tank  
and Daddy tells you the world is your oyster...  
More like a barnacle! Dear god, you can barely flutter, little scallop...  
You sink! You leach off and latch onto the stable pillars  
by which I have built for you. I am a pillar. You are barely a pebble.  
You are a legacy. You are a lineage. You are what Mommy looks forward  
to receiving at Thanksgiving and Christmas.  
I am a rule breaker. I am an outlier. I am the abomination that haunts  
their nightmares around Halloween.  
You dress in jade gowns, green like the hills you vacation to.  
I stand jaded. Not out of contempt nor jealousy.  
I'm confused. How are your brains paid for like your ponies?  
Stand and stutter. Be baffled and wordless. Let silence fill your mouth  
for once. I lay into you not because I want to but because  
I need to. For if no one else were to do so, you'd drive  
the next crazier than I. Let my voice echo.  
Let it nag you.  
And pull you.  
Until it's heard.

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